

**Testimony of**  
**Daniel Berglund**  
**Rice Producer**  
**Wharton County, Texas**

**On behalf of**  
**The U.S. Rice Industry**  
**Before the**  
**Committee on Agriculture**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
  
**San Angelo, Texas**  
**May 9, 2006**

**Introduction**

Good morning, Chairman Goodlatte, Ranking Member Peterson and Members of the Committee.

I am Daniel Berglund, a rice producer from Wharton County, Texas. My farm is located in southern Wharton and northern Matagorda counties.

My testimony today has been endorsed by the U.S. Rice Producers Association and the USA Rice Federation.

On behalf of the Texas rice industry, Mr. Chairman, we thank you for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to express our views on farm policy and the farm bill.

As Congress holds these hearings in preparation for the next farm bill, the U.S. rice industry supports maintaining an effective farm safety net that includes a marketing loan program, as well as income support payments and planting flexibility.

At this time, rice producers and others in production agriculture face an uncertain farm policy and personal financial future due to repeated proposals to cut our farm programs and the ongoing Doha Round World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations.

For these reasons, the U.S. rice industry supports an extension of the 2002 Farm Act in its current form until such time as the World Trade Organization provides a multilateral trade agreement that is approved by the U.S. Congress.

Without a doubt, the 2002 Farm Act continues to be a sound, effective investment in farmers and rural communities. More importantly, consumers benefit from the most stable, safe, abundant, and affordable food supply in the world.

## **2002 Farm Act Extension**

The current Farm Bill is not perfect, however, producer representatives of all 6 states of the U.S. rice industry have adopted the following resolution:

“Until such time as the World Trade Organization provides a multilateral trade agreement that is approved by the U.S. Congress, the U.S. rice industry seeks the extension of the 2002 Farm Bill in its current form.”

There are a number of key factors that support extending the 2002 Farm Act until a final WTO agreement is in place.

1. Any reduction of the current programs and spending levels of the farm bill will result in the effect of “unilateral disarmament” by the U.S. and ultimately weaken our negotiating position with other countries.
2. Writing a new farm bill in advance of a final WTO agreement could result in a very short-term bill that must be rewritten once WTO negotiations are concluded and the new trade rules are known. Multiple farm bill authorizations in a short timeframe will weaken the predictability and stability that are key components of any effective farm safety net. This predictability is a key requirement for the lending community that provides financing for production agriculture. Any changes that inject uncertainty into this safety net will lead to financing difficulties.
3. It is a fiscally responsible approach to farm policy and provides a safety net when needed. As such, Congressional estimates of commodity program (CCC) spending through 2005 reflect outlays ranging from \$13 billion to \$19 billion *below* the levels estimated by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) when the farm bill was approved in 2002. Total commodity spending for 2002-2007 is projected to be below the total level estimated in 2002.

There have been two measures introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives to extend the 2002 Farm Bill. H.R. 4332, introduced by the ranking member of this committee,

Representative Colin Peterson (D-MN), and H.R. 4775, introduced by Representative Mac Thornberry (R-TX). This would allow Congress the time necessary to write a new farm bill that would be compliant with an ultimate WTO agreement, whenever that agreement may be reached.

Also, Senator Jim Talent (R-MO), along with Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and 5 other Senators, has introduced a similar measure in the Senate to extend the current farm bill through the crop year after Congress approves a WTO agreement (S. 2696).

Rice producers disagree with those who argue that a farm bill compliant with our WTO obligations can be written concurrently with the negotiation, congressional consideration, or initial implementation of a new WTO Agreement.

Certain WTO decisions ruling against US programs make clear that crafting a WTO compliant Farm Bill is not easy, even when a good faith effort is made over an extended period of time. Writing a WTO compliant Farm Bill during or shortly after the completion of a new WTO Agreement will be very difficult, if not impossible. Ignoring this fact while rushing to write a bill will do a disservice to all of U.S. agriculture.

| Another concern is the timelines for trade-distorting domestic support and tariff reductions in trade agreements. Any timeline for reductions in trade-distorting domestic supports should be concurrent with the timeline for reduction and elimination of tariffs and duties. Otherwise, how will producers handle the interim after support is reduced and increased market access is not obtained for several years? It only makes sense that similar timelines for the phase-in of measurable market access gains and for any reductions in U.S. trade-distorting domestic support should be required in future trade agreements.

### **Critical Needs of Rice Farming Families in Texas and Elsewhere**

For the typical family farm that produces rice, economic survival is dependent upon several key factors:

- An effective farm program that provides basic support through marketing loan eligibility for all production and income support through counter-cyclical and direct payments;
- The maintenance of eligibility for farm program benefits for rice operations of all sizes; and
- The development and expansion of global markets for crop off-take.

While U.S. rice yields are among the highest in the world, our production cost per acre is significantly higher than that for other grains.

These higher costs of production had a direct impact on 2005 crop returns and have impacted producers' 2006 crop planting decisions and returns.

Even with the safety net in place, much higher production costs, in particular for fuel and fertilizer, have reduced and will continue to reduce rice profitability far below levels previously expected.

The 2002 Farm Act addresses the need to support the market price for commodities. It does not address the significant increases we have had in our costs of production. Many farmers say that if the market price does not come up to meet the cost of production by this harvest season, they will not be able to finance their farming in 2007. Marginal yields, low market prices and high costs of production over the last 3 years has caused many farmers, including myself, to utilize equity in their farm assets to pay for shortfalls in their operating loan repayment and equipment payments. This strategy can only last for a short time. You can not borrow yourself out of debt.

In Texas, rice producers face other unique challenges. We have seen our rice acreage decrease this year alone by 26%, to approximately 140,000 to 150,000 acres. At one time, Texas produced as much as 600,000 acres of rice annually. Almost 350,000 acres of rice were produced as recently as 1994.

Part of this acreage reduction has also been due to the unintended consequences of decoupling more of our farm programs from production. In effect, this has resulted in some rice acreage in Texas being idled while landowners collect the direct payment and potentially the counter cyclical payment. While we support the current farm bill and its continuation, we would caution against any further decoupling of payments from production that could lead to a worsening of this situation.

The current programs do not ensure that individual rice farms can make a profit. In the face of rising production costs many farmers—especially those who must rent much of their land—can and do experience significant losses. We estimate over 75% of Texas rice production is by tenant farmers. These losses are occurring despite the current farm programs and the recent improvement in rice market prices off of their historically low levels.

Farm policy, therefore, must recognize the fundamental differences in per acre costs of production in high input, high yielding crops such as rice.

Production costs have increased to their highest levels in history, eroding much of the benefit that farmers would normally expect from improved market prices. As a result, the average producer is barely able—and in some cases unable—to cover the costs of production.

It is important to note that the marketing loan levels for all major crops were increased in the 2002 Farm Act, except for rice and soybeans. Rice has maintained the same loan rate since 1989.

Regarding the rice marketing loan program, there was an initiative by USDA this year to adjust the loan rates for long and medium/short grain rice just as planting was starting here in Texas and in Louisiana. While there were several options under consideration, the ultimate effect would have been a reduction in long grain loan rates and an increase in medium/short grain rates.

The industry raised its concern over this proposal and the poor timing of such a change with USDA and Members of Congress. USDA ultimately chose to set rice loan rates by class for the 2006 crop year as they have consistently for the past 18 years. We greatly appreciate the willingness of USDA to work with the industry on this issue, and to forego any changes in the

loan rates for the 2006 crop year. This will allow time for further study and analysis of the production and market impacts of such changes in the loan rate.

We look forward to continuing to work with USDA on this issue prior to the start of the 2007 crop year. However, given that 2007 is the last year of the current farm bill, it may be appropriate to address any adjustments in rice loan rates by class during the debate on the next farm bill.

## **Payment Limitation Policies**

The U.S. rice industry opposes any further reduction in the payment limit levels provided under the current farm bill. We also oppose any government policies that attempt to “target” payments or apply a means test for agricultural production payments. Payment limits have the negative effect of penalizing viable family farms the most when crop prices are the lowest and support is the most critical. To be a viable family farm, we must use economies of scale to justify the large capital investment costs associated with farming today. It is essential that rice producers maintain eligibility for all production to the non-recourse loan program. Arbitrarily limiting payments results in farm sizes too small to be economically viable, particularly for rice, cotton, and peanut farms across the Sunbelt. Many Texas rice farmers reach the current restrictive payment limit levels at 250-300 acres.

## **The Real Facts on Farm Statistics**

When the issue of payment limits is brought up, oftentimes opponents of production agriculture attempt to use misleading statistics taken out of context for the purpose of making their argument. Here are some key points that I know we are all probably aware of, but it’s important to be reminded of so that we see the real picture of production agriculture.

- 1) **Statistics skewed by “Rural Residence Farms”:** “Rural residence farms” as defined by USDA represent about two-thirds of the 2.1 million “farms” in this country. Excluding these farms where farming is not the primary occupation of the family results in a very different picture about the percentage of “farms” receiving farm program payments. The universe of farms actually producing this nation’s food and fiber is much smaller than 2.1 million. In fact, 38% of farms produce 92% of our food and fiber and receive 87% of farm program payments.
- 2) **Sector-wide “Averages” Hide Unhealthy Subsectors:** Using only averages for the farm sector as a whole when it comes to income data can be misleading about the true condition of various sectors of the agriculture economy. Certain sectors may be squeezed between high costs and low prices while others are experiencing high prices and average costs. Since program crops are being asked to make the cuts, when statistics are given on Net Farm Income, program crops should be examined individually and separate from other agricultural sectors (i.e.: livestock, fruits, vegetables, etc.) A healthy farm economy as a whole does not necessarily translate into all sectors of the economy being healthy.

## Economic Contributions of the U.S. Rice Industry

The regional concentration of rice production makes it an extremely important crop in key producing states. Rice production is an important economic driver in all states and regions where inputs for rice production are manufactured and where rice is milled or processed for food or other uses.

Rice production ranks in the top 8 most valuable crops produced in each of the six major rice-producing states (Texas, Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Missouri). In 2004, rice was the eighth most valuable of all crops produced in Texas.

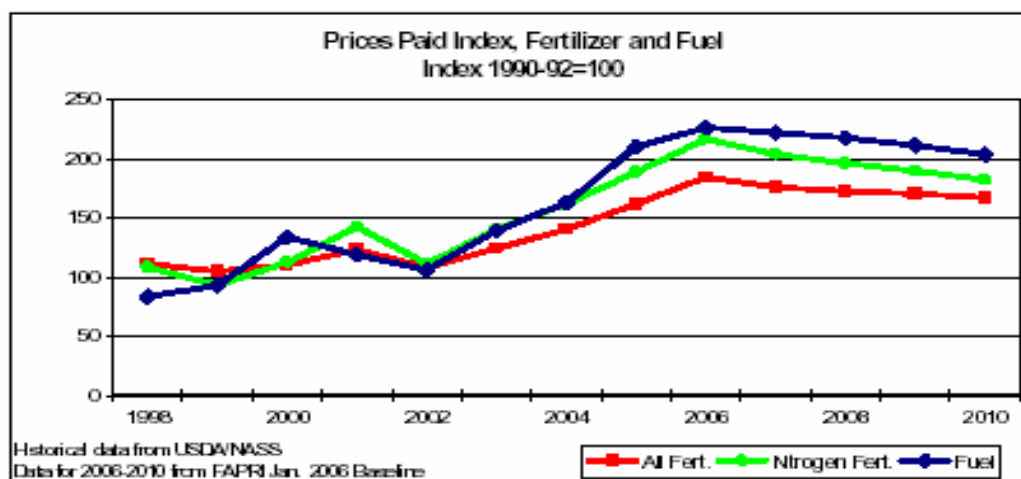
Given the high costs of producing rice compared to most other basic agricultural commodities, the contribution to general economic activity from land devoted to rice production tends to be much higher than for other crops.

High input expenditures for rice production imply significant economic activity for the sectors that supply those inputs in the regions where rice is produced.

Each dollar's worth of rice produced in the United States generates about 90¢ worth of revenue for the industries that supply variable production inputs.

Based on state estimates of production costs and rice acreage planted in 2005, U.S. rice farmers spent nearly \$1.7 billion to produce 3.38 million acres of rice, including both variable costs and basic ownership costs associated with rice production.

Even modest adjustments to the levels of current support could create a significant reduction in rice acreage. These effects would be even more acute when combined with the current spike in fuel, fertilizer, and other energy input costs. The chart below shows the increase in key input costs.



Source: FAPRI

A reduction in rice acreage would necessarily reduce the total economic activity in the region where the reduction occurred. This reduction in economic activity would occur regardless of whether or not an alternative crop is planted, because rice contributes disproportionately to the revenues of various input sectors due to its higher production costs.

It is also important to note that in many regions, including my area of Texas, producers face few viable alternatives to producing rice, so the adverse impact on the agricultural economy if rice production becomes unprofitable could be severe.

This affects all facets of our industry. It's not just about me. It's about my family, my three full time employees and their families, and the jobs of others that support my farming operation. In my operation I spend a considerable amount of capital each year through my farming operation and it's all spent within 40 miles of my farm. In addition to this, my landlords whom I farm on shares with spend an additional 40% for their share of production costs. I know that it doesn't stop here locally, but as of today not all of these moneys would be spent if I quit farming. Not all of the land I farm would continue to be farmed. There is land sitting idle this year that was dropped because of financial problems, and no one could pick it up.

## **Economic Contribution to Key Industries**

**In addition to the economic activity generated from rice farming,** an extensive transportation and processing infrastructure has evolved alongside farm-level rice production. These allied industries are highly dependent on the continued supply of rice to support their economic contribution to the overall economy.

**Mills:** The U.S. rice milling industry performs the important function of processing rice into forms useful to the food and feed industries. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the rice milling industry employs more than 4,000 people, and supports an annual payroll in excess of \$135 million.

**Ports:** At major Gulf ports, for example, rice accounts for about 35% of all food products shipped. Studies have suggested that each ton of rice handled by major ocean ports generates \$50 to the local economy and \$75 to the state economy.

## **Environmental Contributions of the U.S. Rice Industry**

### **Water Quality**

Modern rice production is critically dependent on a reliable supply of water to flood fields. However, the use of this water in responsible rice farming actually produces several environmental benefits that simple irrigation of alternative crops cannot match. For instance:

- **Much of rice irrigation water is returned to its original source.** About 25%-35% percent of the water used for irrigating rice is “recycled” back into the environment. Outflow irrigation water is either reused, percolates to groundwater to recharge aquifers,

or drains back into rivers, thereby conserving water that could otherwise be lost from future beneficial use.

- **Modern rice cultural practices preserve water quality.** The practices widely adopted by rice farmers are credited with preserving water quality and minimizing ground and surface-water contamination relative to many alternative crops. The flooding of rice fields is itself a powerful means of weed management that decreases the need for herbicide use, and timely planting and rapid establishment of rice plants at the proper spacing also suppresses weeds by eliminating the space and light that weeds need to grow. When pesticides are applied, water retention in the flooded fields helps to biodegrade the remaining chemical substances and minimize the potential for contamination.
- **Rice production counteracts other threats facing natural wetlands.** For instance, along the Texas Gulf Coast, freshwater inflow is one of the most important factors affecting the health and productivity of the bay system. Here, freshwater from the land combines with salt water from the Gulf of Mexico, producing brackish water that is the key to estuarine productivity. But as greater demand from industry and residential areas decreases freshwater reaching the bays, high saline conditions threaten habitats that support a multitude of species, including redfish, speckled trout and flounder that fuel the state's recreational fishing industry. To help alleviate this problem, rice farmers release thousands of acre-feet of floodwater in preparation for harvesting their first crop. This inflow of freshwater comes in mid-August when demand is highest, making up for the water tied up in municipal use.

## **Wetlands, Waterfowl, and Wildlife**

Rice farming is one of the few commercial enterprises that actually promotes wildlife habitat and improves biological diversity.

Since the very nature of rice production requires that fields be flooded for many months of the year, evidence shows unequivocally that it plays a vital role in supporting common environmental goals such as protecting freshwater supplies and providing critical habitat for hundreds of migratory bird species.

Rice fields are typically flooded for at least five months a year, during which time they become temporal wetlands with enormous significance to bird populations wintering and breeding in the rice producing states of Texas, Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Missouri, and Mississippi. Both natural and agricultural wetlands are indispensable to bird populations.

Without rice farming, wetland habitats in the United States would be vastly reduced. A loss of this magnitude would have a disastrous effect on waterfowl and a host of other wetland-dependent species.

Rice production areas in Texas correspond with the bird migration corridor known as the Central Flyway, providing important habitat to hundreds of bird species that rely on these artificial



wetlands during their migratory journey. According to the Texas Ornithological Society, Texas is home to nearly 650 different bird species, more than half of which can be found in the Texas Rice Belt.

The clear and positive benefits that commercial rice production has for migratory birds and other wildlife species contribute not only to a more interesting and diverse landscape, but also provide economic benefits that support local economies and create jobs.

By providing a favorable habitat for migratory birds that in most cases would be much smaller without the existence of rice farms, rice production is directly responsible for a very significant proportion of wildlife-related revenues generated in these states.

By providing an environment favorable to wildlife advancement, rice production clearly generates positive environmental benefits to the economy and society.

Rice farming is one of the few agricultural activities where a positive impact on the environment is largely undisputed. As pressures for commercial development and urban sprawl continue to attract existing agricultural and wetland resources, rice farming provides an environmental counterweight in the form of “surrogate” wetlands that directly support waterfowl and a wide range of species that would otherwise be even more threatened by habitat destruction. These widely noted environmental benefits accrue not only to current and future generations of wildlife enthusiasts, but also produce economic benefits that support recreational industries and, ultimately, local economies.

It is clear that taking rice acreage out of production in favor of other crops would not only eliminate the environmental benefits of wetland creation and habitat protection, but could also contribute to the additional environmental stress that many environmentalists often associate with today’s commercial agriculture production, such as groundwater contamination and wetland destruction. While we remain confident that all farmers are good stewards of the land and operate in an environmentally sensitive manner, the clear and undisputed benefits of rice production makes it rank among the top of all agricultural systems in terms of a positive environmental impact.

## **Trade Policy Impacts on the U.S. Rice Industry**

The U.S. market for imported rice is virtually an open-border market, with U.S. tariffs on rice imports almost non-existent. The U.S. rice industry supports the elimination of all rice duties in other importing countries, and equitable tariff treatment for all types of rice.

Despite the general continuing trend towards market liberalization, rice outside the United States has remained among the most protected agricultural commodities. The level of government intervention in the international rice market through trade barriers, producer supports, and state control of trade, is substantially higher than for any other grains or oilseeds.

This is a major factor contributing to price volatility in the international rice market and a fundamental reason why the U.S. industry needs the stabilizing influence of current federal rice programs.

Because the U.S. rice industry exports between 40 and 50 percent of annual rice production, access to foreign markets is fundamental to the health of our industry. We believe that multilateral negotiations through the WTO are a way to bring down trade barriers worldwide. However, the Doha Round negotiations are also about agricultural domestic supports. If an agreement is made, the US proposal will substantially reduce amber box support for the rice industry. It will also substantially reduce the potential for providing support to rice through the Blue Box. Therefore it will be necessary for a Doha Round agreement to foster an open market that provides for the opportunity of a substantial increase in the world price of rice. Only such price increases can begin to make up for the price and income support we will be losing.

Merely moving Aggregate Measure of Support (AMS) to the Green Box in the form of conservation payments will likely not work for commodity support. Currently 63% of U.S. conservation funding goes to operators whose primary occupation is not in agriculture. Conservation support is mostly cost share funding and not price or income support. Conservation support is not bankable with my loan officer at the bank. In addition, we are concerned about the number of countries that will declare rice a sensitive product to block or delay rice imports.

Many of the details of any eventual agreement are still very much under negotiation, and the overall effect of the final agreement on our industry will depend on the overall package that emerges. We recognize the difficulty in reaching an agreement with 149 countries in the Doha Round that will be beneficial for the US rice industry. Perhaps, Free Trade Agreements on a bilateral or regional basis may be as important an avenue to increase market access.

High tariff and non-tariff barriers, such as discriminating import tariffs on U.S. paddy and milled rice exports, also are used.

The United States' share of world rice exports has averaged between about 10% and 13% over the last 10 years, down from a peak of about 30% as recently as 1975.

This decline in world export share reflects increased supplies from traditional exporters like Thailand and Vietnam, among other factors. U.S. sales are also constrained by market access barriers in high-income Asian countries like Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, and the European Union and Latin American countries.

Remember the type of governments we are dealing with when signing trade agreements. We must realize that, unfortunately, they are not always reliable. The US really has limited recourse against a country that goes back on its word. The EU withdrew a trade concession on brown rice in 2004. It took six to nine months to resolve and they imposed a higher tariff than originally agreed to. Mexico has imposed anti-dumping tariffs on milled rice imports from the US, contrary to WTO rules, and playing the review system as they go to continue these tariffs. Time

is of utmost importance when controlling grain inventories. If a surplus arises due to a country's refusal to open its market as agreed to, then our prices start to fall due to over supply.

## **U.S. Trade Sanctions Unfairly Impact the Rice Industry**

In addition to the distorted international markets faced by the U.S. rice industry, U.S. policies intended to punish foreign nations or encourage regime change disproportionately harm U.S. rice producers.

Unilaterally imposed U.S. trade sanctions have played a key role in destabilizing the U.S. rice industry and constraining its long-term market potential. U.S. sanctions have and continue to place downward pressure on market prices to U. S. producers.

Trade sanctions have caused disproportionate harm to rice among U.S. commodity groups. At various times within the past four decades, our number one export markets were closed because of U.S. trade sanctions policy:

**Cuba:** Prior to 1962 Cuba was the largest market for US value-added rice, but since then this important market has been largely closed to US exporters. As a result, China, Vietnam and Thailand have emerged to become major suppliers of the roughly 500,000 metric tons of rice that Cuba imports annually. Recent efforts to ease restrictions on US sales of food and medicine to Cuba under the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000 have allowed the United States to regain a significant share of this market, with US rice exports to Cuba reaching nearly 177,000 metric tons in 2004, valued at more than \$64 million. However, even these important gains are threatened by restrictive regulations imposed by the U.S. Treasury Department that have resulted in the volume of rice exports to Cuba declining by 25% in 2005. The United States has a considerable freight cost advantage over other exporters, which suggests that further easing of the restrictions that remain in place could provide substantial opportunities for much larger rice exports to Cuba.

**Iran:** Similarly, in the 1970's the U.S. rice industry exported on average 300,000 metric tons of value-added rice to Iran. This was the largest U.S. rice export market for value- added rice, and it also was eliminated through the unilateral imposition of U.S. trade sanctions on Iran. But Iran's demand for imported rice continues to grow. In 2004 Iran imported 973,000 metric tons of rice valued at nearly \$300 million, mainly supplied by Thailand and Vietnam.

**Iraq:** In the 1980's, US rice exports to Iraq averaged about 400,000 tons. United Nations sanctions eliminated the market for US producers even while this market grew to nearly 1 million metric tons (\$200 million) supplied primarily by Thailand, Vietnam and China through the U.N. Oil for Food program. In 2005, U.S. rice sales to Iraq were resumed with exports of approximately 310,000 metric tons.

The total of these three markets represents more than 2.5 million metric tons of market potential per year that the United States had lost for decades, and that in many cases remains restricted today far below its full potential. This is equivalent to approximately 25% of current U.S. production.

In light of significant market access barriers in many key rice-consuming countries, U.S. rice farmers are denied the opportunity to compete openly and fairly. These restrictions interfere with the industry's opportunity to discover a market price structure that could reduce the need for government support.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you, again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to express our views.

U.S. farm policy must provide a stabilizing balance to markets and a reliable planning horizon for producers.

We urge you to recognize how well the current Farm Act is working for U.S. agriculture, and to consider ways to maintain its structure as we begin the debate on the next farm bill.

Rice producers are proud:

- to contribute a highly-nutritious food product for the nation;
- of our contributions to the nation's food security;
- of our contributions to the local, state, and national economies and the nation's balance of trade;
- of the contributions we make to conservation and the environment.

Rice producers call on Congress to continue sound, fair agricultural policies in the next farm bill, including those policies in the current farm act that help to provide:

- producers with stability and reliability; and
- consumers with an abundant, affordable, stable, safe, and secure food supply.

Rice producers look forward to working with Congress and the Administration in the development, enactment, and implementation of a sound, equitable farm bill and rice program.

In the interim, however, in light of the need for a strong safety net as part of U.S. farm policy, the U.S. rice industry supports extending the 2002 farm bill in its current form until such time as a Doha Round trade agreement is negotiated and Congress approves it.

This concludes my testimony on behalf of the rice industry, Mr. Chairman.